

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07  
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9601

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RABAT  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

UNCLAS TUNIS 0373

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: ELAB, PGOV, TS  
SUBJECT: HIGHLIGHTS OF NOUIRA PRESS INTERVIEW OVER FRENCH  
RADIO ON TUNISIAN POLITICAL SITUATION

1. HEDI NOUIRA, TUNISIAN PRIME MINISTER, HELD A PRESS  
INTERVIEW OVER RADIO FRANCE WHICH WAS DISSEMINATED IN  
TUNISIA PRESS JAN 14. REPLYING TO QUESTIONS ON THE  
NATURE OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE IN TUNISIA, HE  
CHARACTERIZED AS ABSURD THOSE INTERPRETATIONS WHICH  
PITTED "LIBERAL TENDENCIES AGAINST AN AUTHORITARIAN  
GOVERNMENT" IN A STRUGGLE FOR POWER. HE ADDED THAT  
TUNISIA HAD NEVER BEFORE ENJOYED SUCH A DEGREE OF  
POLITICAL LIBERALISM SINCE HE HAD TAKEN CHARGE OF THE  
GOVERNMENT. BUT, HE SAID, ONE MUST NOT CONFUSE LIBERALISM  
WITH ANARCHY AND CHAOS. EH EMPHASIZED THAT THE WORKERS'  
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UNION DEFENDED SPECIFIC INTERESTS, WHILE THE GOVERNMENT  
MUST DEFEND THE NATIONAL INTEREST. IT WAS NATURAL THAT  
THEY WOULD OFTEN DIVERGE. THE SOCIAL PACT OF JAN 1977  
HAD BEEN BROKEN UNILATERALLY BY THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION  
OF TUNISIAN WORKERS (UGTT). RECENT MAJOR SECTORAL  
STRIKES PROVED THAT THE TUNISIAN REGIME WAS "NEITHER  
DRACONIAN NOR AUTHORITARIAN." HE THEN DEFENDED WAGE

POLICY, SAYING IN EFFECT THAT THE AVERAGE WAGE HAD INCREASED BY 65 PERCENT BETWEEN 1970 AND 1977.

2. LIN REPLY TO A QUESTION ON THE SUBJECT, NOUIRA THEN CHALLENGED THE UGTT TO CECLARE OPENLY A NEW POLITICAL PARTY IF ITS REAL INTENTION WAS TO FORM ONE. HE SAID THAT BOTH THE CONSTITUTION AND THE LAW REMAINED SILENT ON THE EXISTENCE OF A SINGLE PARTY (SUCH AS NOW OBTAINS IN TUNISIA), AND THAT "ELECTIONS WEE FREE." THIS STATEMENT REPRESENTED A MAJOR DEPARTURE FOR A RANKING TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, AND WAS WIDELY COMMENTED UPON HERE.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER THEN TURNED TO FOREIGN POLICY QUESTIONS, EXPRESSING THE CONSTANCY OF TUNISIA'S POSITION ON THE MIDDLE EAST DISPUTE. HE THEN DISCUSSED THE RECENT MEETING ON AFRICAN SOCIALISM IN DAKAR. HE OBJECTED TO A TERM "POST-BOURGUIBISM" USED BY HIS INTERVIEWER: BOURGUIBISM IS "AN ETHIC, A MEANS OF DETERMING CHOICES, OF ACTING, OF THOUGHT, OF BUILDING AND OF REFORM. IT WILL LAST AS LONG AS TUNISIA EXISTS." HE CLOSED THE INTERVIEW BY RELAYING THE MAJOR TOPICS DISCUSSED BETWEEN HIMSELF AND PRESIDENT GISCARD-D'ESTAING: THE MIDDLE EAST AND FRANCO-TUNISIAN BILATERAL AFFAIRS.

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